III.17 WILD HORSES AND BURROS

This chapter presents the environmental setting and affected environment for the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) for wild horses and burros. It describes the environmental setting for the LUPA Decision Area on federal lands; wild horses and burros are managed only on federal lands.

III.17.1 Regulatory Setting

III.17.1.1 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971

Wild horses and burros are protected by the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (16 United States Code 1331-1340), as amended by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978. The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act protects wild, free-roaming horses and burros and their habitats. It directs BLM and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to manage, in their respective jurisdictions, these wild animals on public lands.

The general management objectives for wild horses and burros are to:

1. Protect and manage viable, healthy herds while retaining their free-roaming natures.
2. Provide adequate habitat through the principles of multiple-use and environmental protection, while maintaining a thriving ecological balance.
3. Provide opportunities for the public to view wild horses and burros in their natural habitat.
4. Protect wild horses and burros from unauthorized capture, branding, harassment, or death.

III.17.2 Wild Horse and Burro Herd Management

California contains 33 geographic herd areas where wild horses and burros lived when the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act was passed in 1971. California's free-roaming wild horses and burros range over 7.1 million acres of BLM-administered land and 2.3 million acres of non-BLM land. The USFS does not have jurisdiction over any wild horse and burro territories in the LUPA Decision Area. In a subset of herd areas, known as herd management areas (HMAs), BLM actively manages wild horse and burro herds. Through its land use plans, BLM identified HMAs suitable for the long-term management of wild horses and burros.

California has 22 HMAs on BLM-administered lands. The BLM's management goal for HMAs is to maintain a thriving ecological balance on these lands. BLM studied each HMA to determine appropriate management levels for its wild horses and burros. This assessment considers other natural resources such as vegetation, wildlife, and other uses including livestock grazing and recreation.

The LUPA Decision Area contains several herd areas and five HMAs (Figure III.17-1). These are listed in Table III.17-1 and described in more detail in sections III.17.2.1 through III.17.2.11.

Table III.17-1
Herd Management Areas and Herd Areas Within the LUPA Decision Area

HMAs and Herd Areas	BLM Acres
Cadiz Valley and Chocolate Mountains Ecoregion Subarea	
Chemehuevi HMA	12,500
Chocolate–Mule Mountains HMA	128,000
Herd Areas (Chemehuevi, Chocolate–Mule Mountains, and Picacho)	386,000
Total	**565,500**
Imperial Borrego Valley Ecoregion Subarea	
Chocolate–Mule Mountains HMA	66,000
Herd Areas (Chocolate–Mule Mountains and Picacho)	81,000
Total	**147,000**
Kingston and Funeral Mountains Ecoregion Subarea	
Chicago Valley HMA	258,000
Herd Areas (Chicago Valley, Clark Mountain, and Lava Beds)	475,000
Total	**733,000**
Mojave and Silurian Valley Ecoregion Subarea	
HMAs	0
Herd Areas (Lava Beds and Slate Range)	21,000
Total	**21,000**
Owens River Valley Ecoregion Subarea	
Lee Flat HMA	1,000
Centennial HMA	6,000
Herd Areas (Centennial and Lee Flat)	35,500
Total	**42,500**
Panamint Death Valley Ecoregion Subarea	
HMAs	0
Herd Areas (Centennial, Panamint, Sand Spring–Last Chance, and Slate Range)	239,000
Total	**239,000**

Table III.17-1
Herd Management Areas and Herd Areas Within the LUPA Decision Area

HMAs and Herd Areas	BLM Acres
Pinto Lucerne Valley and Eastern Slopes Ecoregion Subarea	
HMAs	0
Herd Areas (Morongo)	7,000
Total	**7,000**
Piute Valley and Sacramento Mountains Ecoregion Subarea	
Chemehuevi HMA	93,000
Herd Areas (Chemehuevi and Dead Mountain)	339,000
Total	**432,000**
Providence and Bullion Mountains Ecoregion Subarea	
HMAs	0
Herd Areas (Granite–Providence Mountains and Piute Mountain)	43,500
Total	**43,500**
West Mojave and Eastern Slopes Ecoregion Subarea	
HMAs	0
Herd Areas (Centennial and Kramer)	16,500
Total	**16,500**
California Desert Conservation Area Outside the DRECP Boundary	
Centennial HMA	65,000
Lee Flat HMA	71,000
Palm Canyon HMA	2,000
Piper Mountain HMA	86,000
Waucoba-Hunter Mountain HMA	22,000
Herd Areas (Centennial, Coyote Canyon, Lee Flat, Morongo, Palm Canyon, Panamint, Piper Mountain, Sand Spring–Last Chance, and Waucoba–Hunter Mountain)	547,000
Total	**793,000**

Note: The following general rounding rules were applied to calculated values: values greater than 1,000 were rounded to the nearest 1,000; values less than 1,000 and greater than 100 were rounded to the nearest 100; values of 100 or less were rounded to the nearest 10, and therefore totals may not sum due to rounding. In cases where subtotals are provided, the subtotals and the totals are individually rounded. The totals are not a sum of the rounded subtotals; therefore, the subtotals may not sum to the total in the table.
Source: BLM 2007 and BLM GIS data 2013

The environmental baseline includes more than 50 renewable energy projects that are either under construction or nearly completed in the DRECP area. These projects are listed in Appendix O and shown in Figure III.1-2a and Figure III.1-2b (Chapter III.1, Section III.1.3.3). There is no overlap between these renewable energy projects and either HMAs or herd areas.

III.17.2.1 Cadiz Valley and Chocolate Mountains Ecoregion Subarea

The Cadiz Valley and Chocolate Mountains ecoregion subarea contains a large portion of the Chocolate–Mule Mountains HMA, a small portion of the Chemehuevi HMA, and approximately 386,000 acres of herd areas (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1). The Chemehuevi HMA, in eastern San Bernardino County, covers an area from 7 miles south of Needles, California, to the Parker Dam on the Colorado River, and stretches east of U.S. Route 95 eastward to the Colorado River. As of 2012, this HMA contained approximately 108 wild burros. The Chemehuevi HMA consists of 79,000 acres; approximately 12,500 acres are within BLM-managed lands in the LUPA Decision Area (BLM 2007).

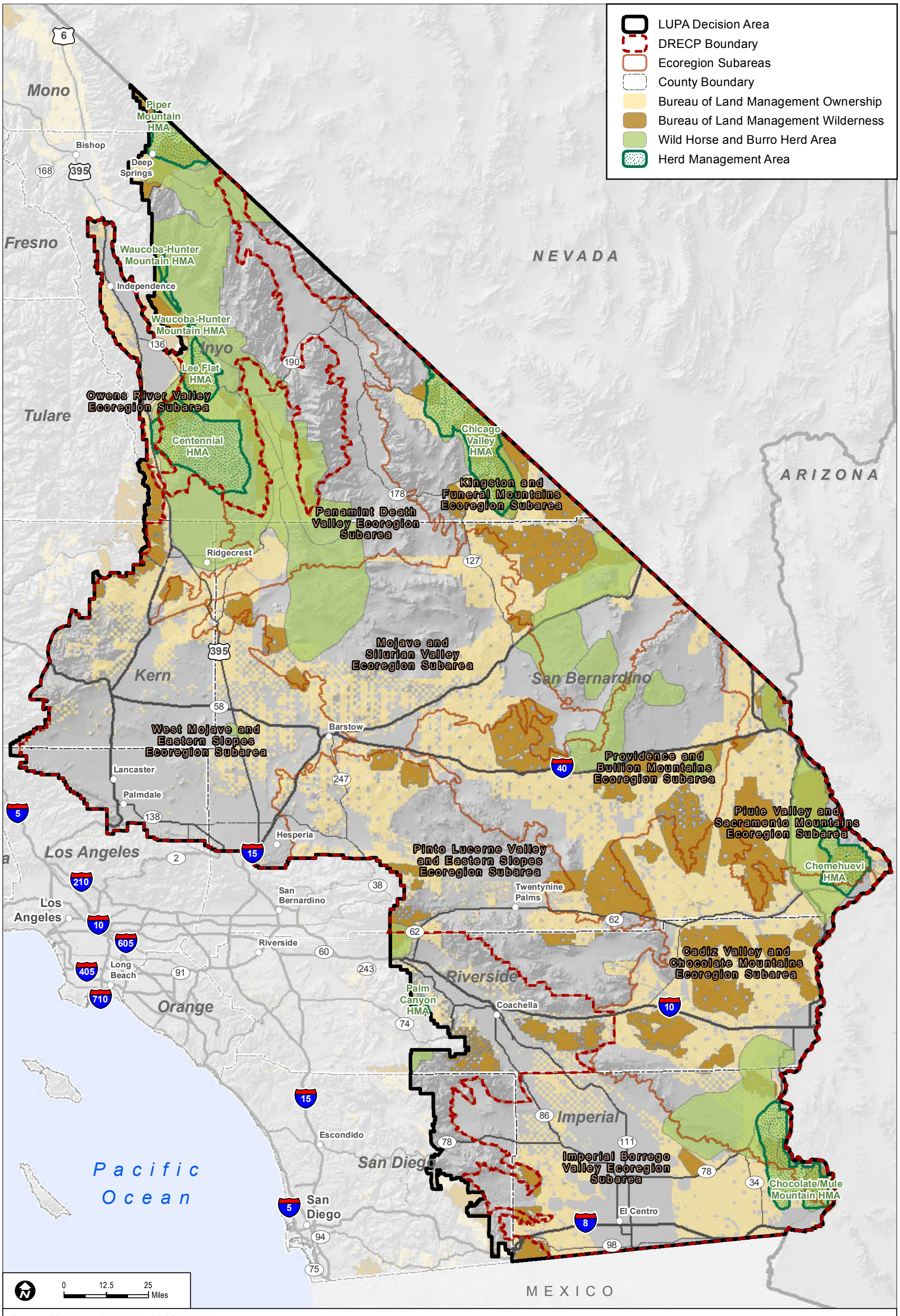
The Chocolate–Mule Mountains HMA is in southeastern Imperial County, along the Colorado River bordering the Picacho State Recreation Area west of Yuma, Arizona (see Figure III.17-1). As of 2012, this HMA contained 121 wild burros. The burros in these areas are believed to originate from mining operations in the 1800s. With introduction of the railroad and abandonment of the mines, miners abandoned their animals into the foothills (BLM 2012[a] and 2012[b]). The Chocolate–Mule Mountains herd area and the Cibola-Trigo HMA were combined and reduced under the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) and are now called the Chocolate-Mule Mountains HMA. This HMA encompasses 159,000 acres; approximately 128,000 acres are within BLM-managed lands in the LUPA Decision Area (BLM 2007).

III.17.2.2 Imperial Borrego Valley Ecoregion Subarea

The Imperial Borrego Valley ecoregion subarea contains approximately 66,000 acres of the Chocolate-Mule Mountains HMA, as well as approximately 81,000 acres of herd areas (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1). The Chocolate-Mule Mountains HMA is described in Section III.17.2.1, Cadiz Valley and Chocolate Mountains Ecoregion Subarea.

III.17.2.3 Kingston and Funeral Mountains Ecoregion Subarea

The Kingston and Funeral Mountains ecoregion subarea contains the Chicago Valley HMA as well as approximately 475,000 acres of herd areas (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1). The Chicago Valley HMA is in southeastern Inyo County along the California-Nevada border near Death Valley Junction. This HMA consists of approximately 278,000 acres managed for wild horses, approximately 258,000 acres of which are within BLM-managed lands in the LUPA Decision Area. As of 2012, this HMA contained 12 wild horses. The horses in this area are believed to originate from ranching operations (BLM 2012[c]).



Sources: ESRI (2014); BLM (2015); RECON (2015)

FIGURE III.17-1

Wild Horse and Burro Herd Areas and Herd Management Areas within the LUPA Decision Area

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III.17.2.4 Mojave and Silurian Valley Ecoregion Subarea

The Mojave and Silurian Valley ecoregion subarea contains approximately 21,000 acres of herd areas and no HMAs (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1).

III.17.2.5 Owens River Valley Ecoregion Subarea

The Owens River Valley ecoregion subarea contains small portions of both the Lee Flat and Centennial HMAs and approximately 35,500 acres of herd areas. The Lee Flat HMA is east of the dry Owens Lake bed in Inyo County (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1). In this HMA, a total of 73,000 acres is managed for wild burros even though there were no wild burros in this HMA as of 2012. As a result of the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, Death Valley National Park acquired 45% of the Lee Flat HMA, which contained permanent, reliable water sources for burros. The National Park Service, which now administers the area, removed the burros in the early 2000s. The wild burros in this area are believed to originate from mining operations in the mid-1800s (BLM 2012[d]). Approximately 1,000 acres of the Lee Flat HMA are within BLM-managed lands in the LUPA Decision Area.

The Centennial HMA is in Kern County, approximately 10 miles north of Ridgecrest, California (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1). This HMA consists of 319,000 acres managed for wild horses. As of 2012, this HMA contained 400 wild horses and 180 burros. Approximately 6,000 acres of the Centennial HMA are within BLM-managed lands in the LUPA Decision Area. The horses in this area are believed to originate from ranching operations (BLM 2012[e]).

III.17.2.6 Panamint Death Valley Ecoregion Subarea

The Panamint Death Valley ecoregion subarea contains approximately 239,000 acres of herd areas and no HMAs (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1).

III.17.2.7 Pinto Lucerne Valley and Eastern Slopes Ecoregion Subarea

The Pinto Lucerne Valley and Eastern Slopes ecoregion subarea contains approximately 7,000 acres of herd area and no HMAs (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1).

III.17.2.8 Piute Valley and Sacramento Mountains Ecoregion Subarea

The Piute Valley and Sacramento Mountains ecoregion subarea contains a large portion of the Chemehuevi HMA as well as approximately 339,000 acres of herd areas (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1). The Chemehuevi HMA is described in more detail in Section III.17.2.1. Approximately 93,000 acres of the Chemehuevi HMA are within BLM-managed lands in the LUPA Decision Area.

III.17.2.9 Providence and Bullion Mountains Ecoregion Subarea

The Providence and Bullion Mountains ecoregion subarea contains approximately 43,500 acres of herd areas and no HMAs (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1).

III.17.2.10 West Mojave and Eastern Slopes Ecoregion Subarea

The West Mojave and Eastern Slopes ecoregion subarea contains approximately 16,500 acres of herd areas and no HMAs (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1).

III.17.2.11 CDCA Area Outside the DRECP Boundary

The CDCA Area outside the DRECP boundary contains all or portions of five HMAs and nine herd areas, the majority in the northern area in Inyo County. There are approximately 547,000 acres of wild horse and burro herd areas and approximately 246,000 acres of HMAs in the CDCA area outside the DRECP boundary (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1).

The Centennial and Lee Flat HMAs are described in more detail in Section III.17.2.5. The Palm Canyon HMA is in Riverside County, California (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1). This HMA consists of 9,500 acres managed for wild horses. As of 2012, this HMA contained six wild horses. Approximately 2,000 acres of the Palm Canyon HMA are within BLM-managed lands in the LUPA Decision Area. The horses in this HMA likely originated from historical ranching stock (BLM 2012[f]).

The Piper Mountain HMA is in Inyo County approximately 20 miles east of Bishop, California (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1). This HMA consists of 86,000 acres managed for wild horses and wild burros. As of 2012, this HMA contained 17 wild horses and 82 burros. The approximate 86,000-acre Piper Mountain HMA is within BLM-managed lands in the LUPA Decision Area. The horses in this area likely originated from historical ranching stock. The burros are thought to have been abandoned in the mid-1800s when mining operations began to fail (BLM 2012[g]).

The Waucoba–Hunter Mountain HMA is in southern Inyo County approximately 30 miles east of Olancha, California (see Table III.17-1 and Figure III.17-1). This HMA consists of 23,000 acres managed for wild burros. As of 2012, this HMA contained 11 wild burros. Approximately 22,000 acres of the Waucoba–Hunter Mountain HMA are within BLM-managed lands in the LUPA Decision Area. The burros in this area are thought to have been abandoned in the mid-1800s when mining operations began to fail (BLM 2012[h]).

III.17.3 Transmission Outside the DRECP Area

The transmission corridors outside the DRECP area generally fall into four geographic areas: San Diego, Los Angeles, North Palm Springs–Riverside County, and the central California Valley. This setting includes designated HMAs and herd areas for wild horses and burros within 1.5 miles of the center of transmission corridors, or a 3-mile-wide swath. The 3-mile-wide swath was chosen to conservatively account for potential deviations on the route.

The transmission corridors in the Los Angeles, San Diego, and Central Valley areas do not include either HMAs or herd areas. In the North Palm Springs–Riverside area, two HMA/herd areas are within a 3-mile-wide swath of the transmission corridors. The Morongo herd area would be traversed for approximately 4 miles, and the Palm Canyon HMA and herd area would be within approximately 1.5 miles of a transmission corridor under Alternative 2 (BLM 2013).

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